

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PORT M 00030 210223Z

67

ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 /056 W

----- 064755

R 190447Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1140

INFO CINCPAC HOLOLULU HI

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: PGOV, PP

SUBJECT: PNG NATIONAL ELECTIONS

REF: A. 75 PORT MORESBY 169 B. 75 PORT MORESBY 731
C. 75 PORT MORESBY 1051

1. LOCAL PRESS JANUARY 15 REPORTS MOVES FOR A GENERAL ELECTION THIS YEAR GAINED MOMENTUM WITH OPPOSITION LEADER TEI ABAL BEING QUOTED AS STATING HE WILL ASK UNITED PARTY MEMBERSHIP TO MOVE A VOTE OF NO CONFIDENCE IN THE GOVT. CONSTITUTIONALLY SUCH A VOTE CANNOT OCCUR PRIOR TO MARCH 16.

2. ELECTIONS ARE CURRENTLY SCHEDULED FOR 1977 AS RESULT JULY 1975 CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY DECISION (REF B).

3. BOTH PRIME MINISTER AND LEADER OF OPPOSITION SUPPORTED MOTION IN OCTOBER 1975 CALLING FOR 1976 ELECTIONS, BUT PARTY DISCIPLINE IN PNG IS SO FRAIL THAT BACKBENCHERS FROM GOVT AND OPPOSITION DEFEATED THE MOTION BY A 44-20 MARGIN.

4. TEI'S STATEMENT ADDS TO THE MOMENTUM FOR 1976 ELECTIONS GENERATED WHEN TWO GOVT MINISTERS (BOTH MEMBERS OF THE HIGHLAND-BASED NEW GUINEA NATIONAL PARTY) STRONGLY CRITICIZED
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PAGE 02 PORT M 00030 210223Z

SOMARE AFTER THE RECENT CABINET RESHUFFLE AND CALLED FOR ELECTIONS

THIS YEAR.

5. SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT, WHO NORMALLY HAS KEEN APPRECIATION OF MEMBER'S SENTIMENTS, STILL BELIEVES THAT BACKBENCHERS WOULD DEFEAT ANY CALL FOR ELECTIONS THIS YEAR FEARING THAT THEY WOULD SIMPLY BE VOTING THEMSELVES OUT OF A GOOD JOB. IN ADDITION HE STATED GOVT NOT KEEN TO HOLD NATIONAL ELECTIONS UNTIL BOUGAINVILLE SECESSION IS DEFLATED. HOLDING OF NATIONAL ELECTION NOW WOULD PLAY INTO SECESSIONIST HANDS WHO WOULD LIKE NOTHING MORE THAN TO GAIN LEGITIMACY THEY DO NOT NOW POSSESS UNDER AUSPICES OF GPNG SPONSORED NATIONAL ELECTIONS.

6. SPEAKER DID NOT DISCUSS OTHER INHIBITIONS, NOT LEAST OF WHICH ARE CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS REQUIRING ANY VOTE OF NO CONFIDENCE PRIOR TO MAY 16 TO INCLUDE NAME OF PRIME MINISTER'S SUCCESSOR, AND REQUIREMENT FOR ABSOLUTE MAJORITY (52 VOTES) FOR MEASURE TO PASS. FURTHER, VOTE OF NO CONFIDENCE, IF PASSED PRIOR MAY 16 WOULD REQUIRE A CHANGE OF MINISTERIES NOT NEW ELECTIONS. AFTER MAY 16 A NOT CONFIDENCE VOTE WOULD RESULT IN ELECTIONS. SPEAKER ADMITTED HE WILL NOT HAVE ACCURATE SOUNDING MEMBERS VIEWS UNTIL PARLIAMENT CONVENES MARCH 1, BUT HE IS NOW OF THE VIEW THAT ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD IN JANUARY 1977.

COMMENT: THE SCENARIO ON ELECTIONS IS BEGINNING TO TAKE ON THE SAME PATTERN AS THAT PRECEDING THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF A DATE FOR INDEPENDENCE LAST YEAR. PARTY DISCIPLINE IS SO WEAK, AND PERSONAL INTEREST SO OVERRIDING, THAT ONLY AN ASSESSMENT OF THE EBB AND FLOW CAN BE REPORTED.

THE SPEAKER IS BETTING ON JANUARY 1977 IS PROBABLY REFLECTING SOMARE'S CURRENT DESIRES BUT SOMARE DOES NOT ALWAYS GET WHAT HE WANTS WHEN HE WANTS IT.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: NATIONAL ELECTIONS, ELECTION FORECASTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 19 JAN 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: morefirh
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976PORTM00030
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760021-1001
From: PORT MORESBY
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760144/aaaabmya.tel
Line Count: 94
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 PORT MORESBY 169, 76 PORT MORESBY 731
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: morefirh
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 01 JUN 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <01 JUN 2004 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <02 JUN 2004 by morefirh>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PNG NATIONAL ELECTIONS
TAGS: PGOV, PP, PNG
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006